



**Learning and Growing
with Read, Baby, Read:
An Evaluation of the Free
Library of Philadelphia Initiative**

KENT STATE
UNIVERSITY



Authors:

Kathleen Campana, PhD

J. Elizabeth Mills, PhD

Jacqueline Kociubuk

Report designer:

Audrey Pierson, Kent State University VCD Student

Cover photos:

Chris Baker Evans

© April 2024

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the RBR librarians and administrators at the Free Library of Philadelphia for their participation in the evaluation, with special thanks to Chris Caputo, Valerie Samuel, and Kimberly Garrison. We would also like to thank the parents, caregivers, and children who participated in the RBR Initiative and shared their insights and experiences with us. Additionally, we want to thank Kenzie Campana for helping with data entry and analysis. Finally, we would like to thank the William Penn Foundation for their support and guidance during this evaluation. Our work would not have been possible without the efforts of all of these people.

Suggested Citation:

Campana, K., Mills, J.E., & Kociubuk, J. (2024). Learning and Growing with Read, Baby, Read: An Evaluation of the Free Library of Philadelphia Initiative. William Penn Foundation.

This work was supported by a grant from The William Penn Foundation. The opinions expressed in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the William Penn Foundation.

Table of Contents

Introduction	4
A Landscape of Learning in RBR Storytimes	9
Data Collection & Analysis	9
Storytime Practices	12
Early Literacy in Read, Baby, Read Storytimes	14
Infants: Birth to 18 Months	15
Toddlers: 18 to 36 months	16
Family Experiences with the Read, Baby, Read Initiative	18
Family Experiences with Read, Baby, Read at the Library	19
Family Experiences with Read, Baby, Read Outside of the Library	24
Recommendations	28
Conclusion	30
Appendix	32
Appendix 1: Birth to 18 month tables	32
Appendix 2: 18 to 36 month tables	35



photo by Ryan Brandenburg

Introduction

Read, Baby, Read (RBR) is an infant- and toddler-focused initiative, developed by and implemented at the Free Library of Philadelphia (FLP) and funded by the William Penn Foundation. The goal of the initiative is to increase the availability of early education to families in Philadelphia's underserved communities. The program is designed to take early action to reduce the opportunity gap by enabling caregivers and parents, a child's first and best teacher, to access resources and support for early childhood development and engage in purposeful play, both while in the shared community space of their public library and at home. The initiative began with two sites in 2018 and, after initial success, expanded to an additional ten branches in 2020.¹ An additional expansion occurred in 2023, and FLP is planning to onboard additional branches in the future.

RBR provides a variety of infant and toddler focused programming including storytimes, playgroups, and dance parties and special collections of materials including portable play kits filled with board books and developmentally appropriate toys and larger items such as baby carriers and white noise machines. The Initiative also created dedicated permanent "baby spaces" designed specifically for infants and young toddlers. These spaces are open for free play during normal library hours and provide children 0-24 months old with their own special play area filled with baby-friendly play furniture and plenty of developmentally appropriate toys. As part of the RBR Initiative, the FLP provided professional development opportunities to staff on supporting all aspects of child development for babies, toddlers, and their families, and experimented with new community engagement techniques such as community ambassadors.

Because the initial expansion occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic, many FLP branches moved their programming outdoors, to nearby parks and outdoor library courtyards, so they could continue to reach and engage with young children, 0-24 months, and their families. This relocation to outdoor spaces necessitated many changes in the ways that the RBR librarians structure and offer storytime, the ways the librarians communicate with families, and the roles that parents and caregivers have to play in storytime. These shifts and changes in the structure and composition of RBR storytime programs were acknowledged and accounted for in the evaluation. As of 2023, all of the branches had returned to indoor, in-person RBR programs.

The RBR Evaluation

Following the expansion of the RBR initiative in 2020, we began our evaluation of the twelve RBR branches in 2021 to gain further insights into the impact of the initiative on the young children and families who participate. The pandemic-related shifts and changes in the structure and composition of RBR storytime programs also required that we make changes to the ways in which we set up and implemented our various activities so the findings discussed here are situated in this context. This evaluation featured several research activities that individually describe aspects of the overall impact of the initiative on the families who attend (Figure 1). When taken together, these activities paint a rich holistic picture of how libraries are constantly working to meet their communities needs, priorities, and values through purposeful programs, services, spaces, and collections.

Several activities comprise the evaluation, as depicted in Figure 1:

- video-recorded observations of RBR storytimes (which began in 2022 when storytime programs resumed)
- multiple interviews and surveys with RBR librarians and administrators
- surveys with families who attended the storytimes
- literacy experience sampling with a small group of storytime families

FIGURE 1: MULTIFACETED EVALUATION METHODS CONDUCTED IN EVALUATION

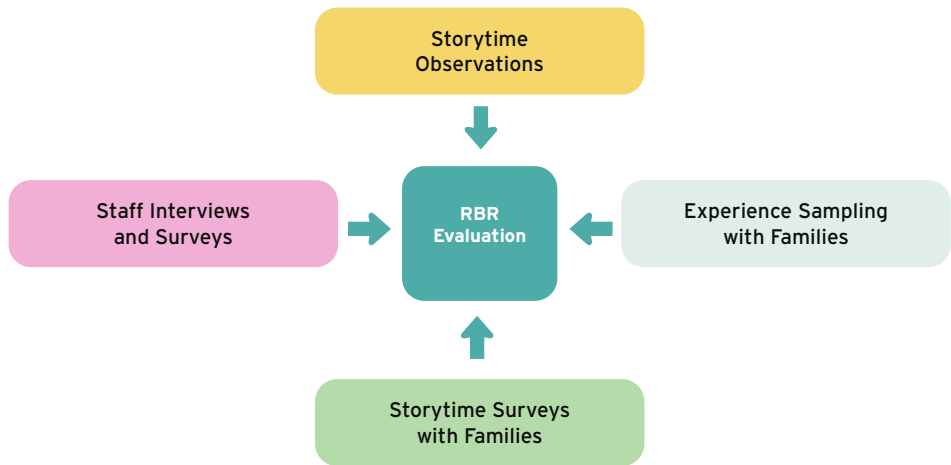


FIGURE 2 - STAKEHOLDERS IMPACTED BY THE RBR INITIATIVE

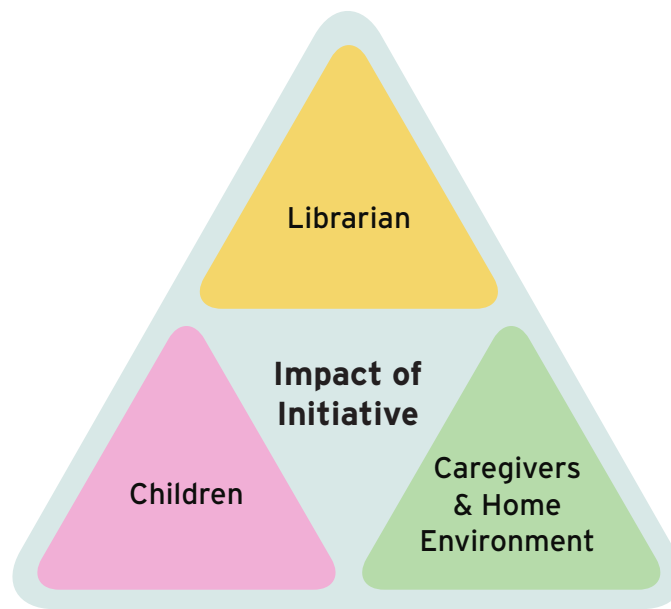


Figure 2 demonstrates the different stakeholders who participate in the RBR in some way and whose experiences were understood through the use of various methods. To understand how, if at all, the RBR librarians were engaging with and supporting early literacy for young children, 0-24 months, and their parents and caregivers, we conducted a coding of the early literacy behaviors in the storytime programs and a mapping of the activities included in each program. To understand the impact on the early literacy behaviors of the children, ages 0-24 months, who attended the storytimes, we conducted an early literacy coding that focused on children's behaviors during the storytimes. Finally, to understand the impact of the initiative on the learning and perception of parents and caregivers and on the home environment, we conducted surveys of the families who attended the programs and we engaged a small group of parents/caregivers in a longitudinal experience sampling design that included interviews, text-based journaling, and online surveys. In these ways, we were able to see how the initiative had an effect on the various stakeholders involved through both empirical and perceptive data.

In 2022, we added an additional aspect to the evaluation that was focused on helping the RBR librarians enhance and expand their engagement with and support of the families who participate in the initiative activities. To do this, we developed a RBR Framework that outlines foundational aspects of the initiative; developmentally appropriate practices for working with infants, toddlers and their caregivers; and key practices that should be included in the initiative's programs (Figure 3). The goal of the framework is to encourage some consistency across the RBR programs and branches, while also allowing for individuality and creativity.

FIGURE 3 - THE RBR FRAMEWORK CORE CONTENT

PURPOSE

RBR storytimes focus equally on:

- Engaging** children, ages 0-24 months, in age-appropriate materials and activities
- Empowering** and supporting caregivers with child development and learning for their children, ages 0-24 months, so that they can continue the practices at home
- Encouraging** bonding and interactions between the children and their caregivers

ELEMENTS

RBR Storytimes consist of:

- A focus on the **capabilities** of children ages 0-24 months through age-appropriate materials and activities
- An intentional focus on **age-appropriate language- and literacy-based interactions** between storytime provider and children and caregivers and children
- Community building** through introductions, use of names, encouraging of social interactions between families before, during, and after storytime
- Repetition** of some songs and rhymes at least twice during a program to help scaffold the activity; choosing songs with repetitive structure; even repeating songs week to week
- Caregiver empowerment** through caregiver tips, handouts, and resource recommendations
- Caregiver-child bonding/interactions** through the incorporation of elements that promote interaction between caregivers and children and explicit instruction for caregivers on how to interact with their children
- Physical movement** through activities that encourage both gross and fine motor movements for the child themselves, if they are able, or for the children and caregiver to do together
- Sensory explorations** through manipulatives and activities that engage children's different senses
- Self-reflection** by the storytime provider through regular periods of reflection on their RBR storytimes and the attendees' responses, engagement, and experiences



photo by Ryan Brandenburg

To supplement the RBR Framework, we also offered several professional development sessions. In 2022, we offered sessions on:

- The Framework and key baby/toddler programming practices, and
- Social-emotional learning for infants and toddlers and engaging parents and caregivers.

Then, late in 2023, the evaluation was extended with the goals of developing a broader onboarding training process for the initiative, evaluating new RBR sites, and implementing additional professional development workshops for RBR staff on:

- Early math,
- Music and movement, and
- Playful learning and building community for families.

This report focuses on findings uncovered during the main evaluation (2021 to mid-2023) related to the impact of the RBR Initiative for the children and families who attended the RBR programs. This impact is demonstrated through the following:

- What the young children, 0-24 months, and their families are experiencing in the storytimes
- The families' experiences with the RBR storytimes and broader initiative, as reported in the surveys and experience sampling activities
- The transfer of RBR content, strategies, and practices into the home environment as reported in the surveys and experience sampling activities

Therefore, only data from the observations, family storytime surveys, and literacy experience sampling completed during the main evaluation will be detailed in this report. However, throughout the evaluation, data from all of the activities has been analyzed and shared with FLP staff to allow them to act on the data and revise or implement aspects of the Initiative. An additional report that profiles findings and recommendations from the extension activities is forthcoming.



photo by Ryan Brandenburg

A Landscape of Learning in RBR Storytimes

The RBR storytimes serve as the centerpiece of the RBR Initiative as they are offered in every branch that participates in the Initiative. Because of this we chose observations of the storytimes as a key piece of the evaluation to provide an understanding of the impact they are having on the young children and parents/caregivers who attend. More specifically the observations allowed us to understand the learning landscape provided by the RBR storytimes by thoroughly examining 1) how the RBR librarians are facilitating learning experiences in their storytimes for both the children and their parents/caregivers through playful storytime practices, interactions, and information sharing, 2) the early literacy concepts and skills that are present in the storytime content, and 3) how the children and parents/caregivers are interacting with and reacting to the storytime content and the early literacy concepts and skills.

Data Collection & Analysis

For the observations, we conducted three site visits to each of the twelve RBR FLP branches and collected video-recordings of the storytime programs. As explained above, many of these storytime programs were relocated to nearby parks, courtyards, gardens, etc., during the first and second visits. As a part of the video-recordings, we recorded the storytimes from two different angles: one video recording was of the RBR librarian offering the program and the other was of the program participants (children and caregivers). After the visits, the storytimes were observed and coded by all of the researchers.

To help us understand how the RBR librarians are facilitating early literacy and learning experiences in their storytimes and how the children and caregivers are responding, we chose to code and analyze the observations in two ways: conducting storytime mapping coding to understand what foundational baby/toddler storytime practices were present and coding the storytime content and children’s behaviors with two early literacy observation tools.

Storytime Mapping: To begin the process of mapping the storytimes for the foundational baby/toddler storytime practices, we observed a few initial storytimes and took note of what we were and were not seeing based on library and early childhood development literature. We then discussed these notes to agree on a list of initial storytime practices that would be included in the code system. After mapping a few storytimes, we compared the list of storytime practices, particularly those not present, with the RBR training content to help finalize the list of foundational storytime practices that should be present in a RBR storytime for infants/toddlers.

Early Literacy Coding: The early literacy coding was done using two early literacy observation tools—BCPAF and PET—that have previously been used to explore early literacy in library programs for young children.² The BCPAF and PET tools are comprised of several early literacy goals that are related to foundational early literacy skills. Each goal contains between two and eight behavioral indicators that are related to the broader early literacy goals. Each tools is separated into three age range sections: birth to 18 months, 18 to 36 months, and 36 to 60 months.³ For this reason, even though the RBR storytimes are primarily aimed at children, birth to 24 months, the findings include indicators that go up to 36 months. These tools were deemed appropriate for this study because families often attend library storytimes with older siblings and librarians are prepared to accommodate a wider age range than is initially advertised. Prior to beginning the observations, we wanted to ensure that we were each identifying and labeling things the same way, to ensure reliable and valid findings. To do this, we engaged in an intercoder reliability exercise to determine if we were applying the codes in a similar manner. The scores revealed that we were indeed reliable, or had moderate to strong agreement,⁴ with regard to the application of the codes in both coding tools (Table 1).

TABLE 1: INTERCODER RELIABILITY FOR STORYTIME CODING

	Pearson's R	Cohen's Kappa
BCPAF	0.91	0.776
PET	0.89	0.67

Procedure

For the observations, the researchers watched both videos from each storytime and took detailed field notes that included information on the storytime content, as well as the behaviors and verbal

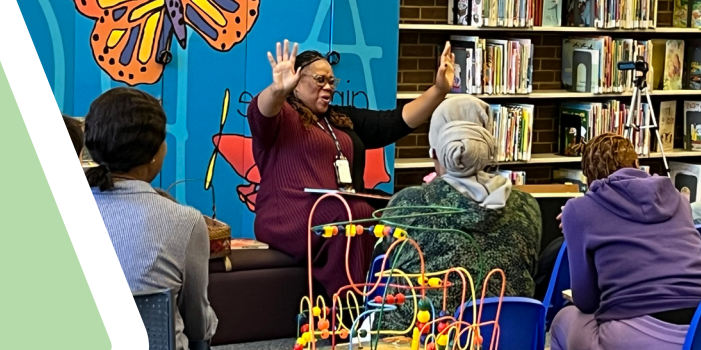


photo by Jacqueline Kociubuk

utterances of the RBR librarians, the children and caregivers. These field notes were coded with the storytime mapping codes and then with both early literacy observation tools. The storytime mapping codes were analyzed by calculating the percentage of the storytimes in each visit that incorporated each storytime practice at least once. The early literacy coding was analyzed by calculating the average percentage of indicators observed under each developmental goal across the twelve storytimes in each visit. The results from the storytime mapping and early literacy coding are summarized in the sections below and the full early literacy coding is detailed in tables included in the appendix.

Storytime Practices

Data from the storytime mapping across the three site visits conducted during the evaluation revealed that, for the most part, the RBR storytimes have many of the core baby/toddler storytime practices in place (Table 2). Nearly all of the storytimes included stories, songs, proximal sensory interactions,⁵ (which are important for very young children, given their limited motor and vision skills), and movement. Furthermore, the majority of the RBR librarians were verbally encouraging children to engage in the movement activities and modeling the movements for them. About half of the RBR librarians offered a post-storytime activity that allowed for more diverse learning opportunities and additional social interactions between the children and their families. Increasing the number of storytimes that offer these post-storytime activities is important as they can help support community building between the families and the RBR librarian. Moreover, post-storytime activities allow the families to interact with the RBR librarian on an individual basis to gain personalized guidance and advice.

We identified two clear areas of growth through our mapping analysis. The first area involves the interactions between the RBR librarian and caregivers, an important aspect of baby and toddler storytimes. Initially these interactions were not observed as frequently: in visit 1, we observed only 58% of the RBR librarians verbally encouraging caregivers to interact with their child at different points during a storytime. However, after covering this in professional development with the RBR librarians, we observed an increase to 75% of them verbally encouraging these interactions during storytime in visits 2 and 3. There was a similar increase in terms of the number of RBR librarians demonstrating or modeling how caregivers can engage in these interactions with their children. In this way, we are observing more RBR librarians taking the time to connect with caregivers and help them understand how to interact with their little one during the storytime through both explicit instruction and modeling.



photo by Jacqueline Kociubuk

The second area of growth is in the use of repetition in storytimes. We initially saw about half of the RBR librarians in visit 1 incorporating repetition—doing a song, rhyme, or bounce more than once to reinforce the learning that was taking place for children. After covering the importance of repetition in professional development, we saw that frequency increase to 67% in visit 2 and then in visit 3 all of the RBR librarians incorporated repetition in their storytimes. This is a positive and encouraging outcome for these RBR librarians and for the families they serve.

There are also opportunities for continued improvement. First, while we saw an increase across visits in the number of RBR librarians including caregiver tips and asides in their storytime, there is lots of room to include more of these tips more often in RBR storytimes. These help to empower the caregivers and explain why the activities in the storytime help to enhance their children's learning. These tips can also inspire caregivers to repeat the activity and actions later at home, thereby continuing the learning. Because caregiver education and support is an important aspect of baby storytimes, it is crucial that these RBR librarian-caregiver interactions become more consistent and prevalent across the RBR storytimes.

A second area for improvement was in the use of activities that promote fine motor movement for babies and toddlers. From visit 1 to visit 2, we saw a decrease from 92% to 83% in the use of fine-motor activities; from visit 2 to visit 3, on the other hand, we saw a return to 92%. On the other hand, with gross motor activities, we saw an initial increase from visit 1 to visit 2 from 92% to 100% and then a dip from visit 2 to visit 3 down to 83%. These opportunities for babies and toddlers to move using both large and small motions are so critical for their physical and cognitive development.

Third, while in visit 1 we observed 75% of the RBR librarians incorporating fingerplays and rhymes, in visits 2 and 3 we only saw a little more than half of the RBR librarians offering these activities. We encourage RBR librarians to continue to seek out ways to insert these fingerplays and rhymes into their programs as these activities are rich with early literacy and physical development opportunities.

One storytime activity remained the same across all three visits—flannel board activities—at 25%. And yet, we saw innovative ways in which the RBR librarians that do flannel board activities were using them, such as to tell oral stories, to sing a song, or to do a rhyme and fingerplay. RBR librarians can share ideas with one another and look for ways to incorporate flannel board activities into their storytimes, as these larger platforms for storytelling and singing are helpful for children to see what is happening and participate in the activity.

TABLE 2: STORYTIME PRACTICES OBSERVED ACROSS VISITS 1-3

Storytime Practice	Visit 1 (N = 12 storytimes)	Visit 2 (N = 12 storytimes)	Visit 3 (N = 12 storytimes)
Incorporated songs	92%	100%	100%
Incorporated stories	100%	100%	100%
Incorporated fingerplay/rhymes	75%	58%	58%
Incorporated tips for caregivers on early learning and child development	33%	58%	50%
Incorporated flannel board activity	25%	25%	25%
Used repetition	50%	67%	100%
Incorporated proximal sensory interactions (bubbles, manipulatives, etc.)	100%	92%	92%
Verbally encouraged caregiver-child interactions	58%	75%	75%
Modeled caregiver-child interactions	42%	75%	67%
Verbally encouraged movements for children	92%	83%	83%
Modeled movements for children	100%	83%	92%
Provided opportunities for fine motor movement	92%	83%	92%
Provided opportunities for gross motor movement	92%	100%	83%

Early Literacy in RBR Storytimes

The literacy coding analysis indicated that the librarians are using the foundational storytime practices detailed above to create a rich early literacy environment as the data revealed that the librarians are incorporating early literacy content for both infants (birth-18 months) and toddlers (18-36 months). In addition, the children, both birth-18 months and 18-36 months, are exhibiting a variety of early behaviors while attending the storytimes. When looking at the correlation between the storytime content and the children's early literacy behaviors together for the birth-18-month age group, there was a low correlation of 0.36 in the first visit. However, for the second and third visits there were stronger correlations between the storytime content and the children's early literacy behaviors: 0.71 for the second visit and 0.63 for the third visit. While the difference between the first visit and second and third visits may be due to developmental characteristics of infants and the unpredictability of their response to others' actions and verbal utterances, it may also be due to the first research visit taking place right after storytimes came back following the pandemic and the unfamiliarity of the storytime environment for the infants. For children 18-36 months, our analysis revealed a strong correlation of 0.768 between the storytime content and the children's early literacy behaviors in the first visit, a moderate correlation of 0.621 in the second visit, and 0.60 in the third visit. The consistency of the correlation across all three visits for the 18-36 month age group and the second and third visit for the birth-18 month age group suggests overall that the children are responding to the early literacy content in the storytime. Some opportunities for growth are identified below, which can inform future professional development and training to strengthen RBR librarians' practice.

photo by Chris Baker Evens



Infants: Birth to 18 Months

Storytime Content

Our literacy analysis of the storytime content revealed that an average of 57% of indicators under each birth-to-18 month goal were observed in all storytimes across all three visits. Across all three visits, the content of the storytimes was particularly strong in the same four early literacy skills:

Receptive Vocabulary & Comprehension

(83.73% of all indicators observed across all visits)

Oral Language

(77.78% of all indicators observed across all visits)

Expressive Vocabulary

(77.78% of all indicators observed across all visits)

Phonological Awareness

(77.78% of all indicators observed across all visits)

For the second and third visit, the storytimes were also strong in indicators related to communicating effectively (73.96% of all indicators observed) and comprehension (68.75% of all indicators observed).

Early Literacy Behaviors

The analysis of the infants' early literacy behaviors revealed that an average of 36% of indicators under each birth-to-18 month goal were observed in all storytimes across all three visits. The following early literacy skills were observed in the infants' behaviors more frequently than others skills:

Listening

(81.67% of all indicators observed across all visits)

Oral Language

(65.97% of all indicators observed across all visits)

Oral & Written Communication

(68.06% of all indicators observed across all visits)

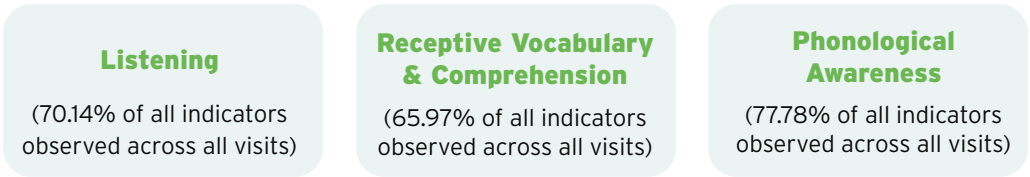
The early literacy skills below were observed the least in the infants' behaviors. Because RBR librarians cannot control children's responses, particularly for this young age, these early literacy skills only represent areas for growth in two ways: 1) ensuring that RBR librarians are including related content to support these skills in their storytimes; and 2) partnering with and empowering caregivers to help their children with these skills in storytimes through modeling, verbally encouraging interactions, and caregiver tips.

- Grammar and syntax (average of 12.96% of all indicators observed across all visits)
- Phonological awareness (average of 20.14% of all indicators observed across all visits)
- Awareness of written materials for a variety of purposes (average of 25.00% of all indicators observed across all visits)

Toddlers: 18-36 Months

Storytime Content

The literacy analysis of the storytime content revealed that an average of 38% of indicators under each 18-36-month goal were observed in all storytimes across all three visits. The lower average percentage for 18-36-month goals may be because the RBR storytimes are designed for children ages 0-24 months so part of the 18-36 month age range falls outside of the target age of the storytime. The content of the storytimes was particularly strong in the following early literacy skills:

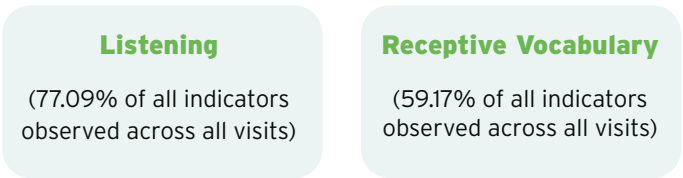


While it was expected that some of the 18-36-month goals would not be observed as much in the storytime content due to the age differences, there were still some areas for growth across all three visits:

- Using language for a variety of purposes (average of 11.11% of all indicators observed across all visits)
- Print concepts (average of 18.05% of all indicators observed across all visits)
- Comprehension of printed material (average of 27.32% of all indicators observed across all visits)
- Appreciation and enjoyment of reading (average of 21.29% of all indicators observed across all visits)

Early Literacy Behaviors

Our analysis of the toddlers' early literacy behaviors revealed that an average of 24% of indicators under each 18-to-36-month goal were observed in all storytimes across all three visits. The following early literacy skills were observed in the toddlers' behaviors more frequently than others across all three visits:



The early literacy skills below were observed the least in the toddlers' behaviors across all visits. Similar to the birth-to-18-month goals, the skills below only represent areas for growth in two ways: 1) ensuring that RBR librarians are including related content to support these skills in their storytimes; and 2) partnering with and empowering caregivers to help children with these skills in storytimes through modeling, verbally encouraging interactions, and caregiver tips.

- Comprehension of printed material (average of 8.59% of all indicators observed across all visits)
- Oral language (average of 3.76% of all indicators observed across all visits)
- Expressive vocabulary (average of 9.40% of all indicators observed across all visits)
- Grammar and syntax (average of 7.42% of all indicators observed across all visits)
- Alphabetic knowledge (average of 8.64% of all indicators observed across all visits)

Overall, the data from the storytime observations revealed that the RBR storytimes are supporting a wide variety of early literacy skills for both babies and toddlers. Even though the RBR librarians are providing a variety of early literacy skills in their storytimes, some areas for growth still exist related to some specific skills. Potential strategies for addressing these areas of growth are outlined in the recommendations section at the end of this report. In addition, it is important to note that the early literacy tools used to code the storytimes do not include indicators related to interactions with caregivers and caregiver behaviors. This exclusion is important to acknowledge as storytimes have the ability to empower caregivers and help them better understand how they can support a variety of early literacy and learning skills for their child. Because of this, it is vital that RBR librarians continue to partner with and empower caregivers, particularly concerning the skills that are areas for growth, through modeling, verbally encouraging interactions, and offering caregiver tips in storytimes.

photo by Jacqueline Kociubuk





photo by Chris Baker Evens

Family Experiences with the RBR Initiative

The impact of the RBR Initiative was also explored through the experiences of families both at the library and in using RBR content and strategies with their child outside of the library. Storytime surveys and an experience sampling process—consisting of interviews, text-based journaling, and digital surveys—were used to gather data on the families' experiences both in and out of the library. The storytime surveys were administered to the families who attended storytimes during each research visit, which resulted in 436 completed surveys. A different version of the survey was used during each visit. While some questions were kept the same across all three surveys, other questions were changed from survey to survey to gain additional insight into families' experiences with the initiative. A selection of survey questions that speak to the impact of the initiative on the families both in and out of the library are detailed below.

The experience sampling activities were conducted with twelve parents/caregivers across a period of 18 months. The engagement periods with the parents/caregivers ranged in duration from six months up to 12 months, depending on parent/caregiver schedules and availability for the activities. These activities yielded rich data that provided insights into these families' everyday lives, the role of the RBR initiative in their lives, and the ways in which parents/caregivers are engaging in early literacy skills and practices with their children as part of their normal routines. A selection of the data is presented below to illustrate the influence and impact of the RBR initiative on these families' daily lives.

Family Experiences with RBR at the Library

Overall, the responses to the storytime surveys and experience sampling activities revealed that the RBR storytimes and the broader initiative have been positively received by families. The caregivers participating in the experience sampling activities shared that they visit the library with their children to attend storytimes on a semi-regular basis as well as to check out books and play in the RBR baby spaces, demonstrating some complexity to these family trips to the library. Many of them shared that they arrive at the library with enough time before storytime to participate in play and other activities; and some stay late for the same reason. Some caregivers even noted a change over time in their child's level of interaction and attention during storytime as they attend on a regular basis, implying that their child has benefited from the experience. The storytime survey respondents supported these findings with a large majority of caregivers sharing that they felt storytime was a valuable experience for their infant/toddler (Table 3).

TABLE 3: CAREGIVERS' PERCEPTIONS ON THE VALUE OF THE RBR STORYTIME THEY ATTENDED

This program provided a valuable experience for my infant/toddler	
Strongly Agree	81.42%
Agree	16.28%
Neutral	0.69%
Disagree	0.00%
Strongly Disagree	0.23%
No Response	1.38%

The storytime surveys also asked the caregivers what they liked about the storytimes and invited them to select multiple options. A large majority reported enjoying the stories (86.70%) and music (86.01%). Movement activities, library staff interactions, and interacting with other families were also fairly popular among the families surveyed (Table 4). Aside from an “other” option, information sharing from the RBR librarians was the only item that was not selected by a majority of caregivers. The responses to this question suggest that families are generally happy with most aspects of storytime. However, the lower response rate with information sharing suggests that work is still needed to help RBR librarians understand how to effectively share information with caregivers on child development, literacy and learning, parenting, and more.

TABLE 4: CAREGIVERS’ PREFERENCES AROUND RBR STORYTIME PRACTICES

What did you like about the storytime?	
Stories	86.70%
Musical activities	86.01%
Movement activities	67.89%
Library staff interactions	60.32%
Interacting with other families	59.17%
Information sharing from RBR librarians	30.50%
Other	4.82%

In fact, when asked in the storytime surveys about their own learning experience, caregiver responses were mixed (Table 5). A majority of caregivers (77.06%) strongly agreed or agreed that they learned something new about parenting or supporting their child’s learning and development during the program. Almost eighteen percent of caregivers (17.89%) were neutral on whether they learned something new and a small percent of caregivers (2.98%) disagreed or strongly disagreed that they learned something new about parenting or supporting their child’s learning and development during the program. These numbers suggest that while RBR storytimes are supporting learning for many caregivers, greater efforts are needed to fully support the learning experience of a majority of caregivers who attend storytime since new caregivers can benefit from support in how to effectively bond and interact with their young children.

TABLE 5: CAREGIVERS' PERCEPTION OF THEIR OWN LEARNING DURING THE RBR STORYTIME

I learned something new (e.g., about parenting or supporting my child's learning and development) during the program.	
Strongly Agree	48.62%
Agree	28.44%
Neutral	17.89%
Disagree	2.29%
Strongly Disagree	0.69%
No Response	2.06%

The caregivers who completed the storytime surveys also had thoughts on how the RBR Initiative and FLP could better support them (Table 6). Twenty-four percent of respondents answered the question, with the 35% of responses offering positive comments about the storytime, RBR librarian, or RBR Initiative, such as “we love the programs and play spaces!” and “I think the activities, such as music & movement, are a great way to support parents, babies, toddlers and caregivers throughout the year.” The second most frequent response centered around wanting the library to increase program offerings for babies, toddlers, and their families (28.57%). These additional program requests included the following:

- More events for babies under one year
- Mom and dad meetup groups for parents of babies and toddlers
- More baby-focused activities and areas
- Storytimes in other languages
- More specialty programs for babies and toddlers (e.g., yoga)

Comments around library scheduling were the next most common response (18.10%) and mainly centered on wanting the library to extend their open hours, particularly to the weekend days, and wanting the library to be “consistently open during open hours.” Program scheduling also came up in the comments (11.43%) with requests for storytimes in the evenings and on the weekends to be “accessible to working parents.” Finally, comments were also made related to improving the storytime experience, such as making the storytime space more secure; wanting more resource recommendations; and wanting additional spaces in the library for young children and their families, such as a breastfeeding area, more playspaces, and an eating area. While some of these comments and requests may be unrealistic at this point given FLP’s current resource constraints, it is important for FLP to figure out how they can act on the needs and desires of caregivers of babies and toddlers, particularly those from underserved communities, in order to keep their services relevant and valuable for these families. In addition, to continue to offer RBR services that are relevant and meaningful for the families, FLP Youth Services administrative team could consider surveying the RBR families on a semi-regular basis.

photo by Jacqueline Kociubuk



TABLE 6: CAREGIVER INSIGHTS INTO HOW FLP MIGHT BETTER SUPPORT CAREGIVERS OF BABIES/TODDLERS

How could the library better support you as a parent of a baby or toddler?	
Positive comments	35.24%
Increase programs for young children and their families	28.57%
Library scheduling	18.10%
Program scheduling	11.43%
Storytime feedback	7.62%
Adding additional space for families of young children	3.81%
Resource recommendations	2.86%

photo by Jacqueline Kociubuk



Ultimately, even though some caregivers who participated in the storytime surveys had feedback on the initiative or were unsure of their own learning experience as a part of it, it is clear that they enjoyed participating in the storytimes and felt that their child should continue attending (Table 7). When asked in the storytime survey if they would continue to attend RBR storytimes with their child in the future, 93.59% responded that they would continue to attend. Only 1.14% were not sure and 0.23% would not attend the RBR storytimes in the future.

TABLE 7: LIKELIHOOD OF REPEAT ATTENDANCE AT RBR STORYTIMES

Will you and your infant/toddler attend RBR storytimes in the future?	
Yes	93.59%
Not sure	1.14%
No	0.23%
No response	5.03%

Family Experiences with RBR Outside of the Library

The data from the experience sampling and the storytime surveys revealed that the RBR initiative is having an impact with the families outside of the library. From the caregivers participating in the experience sampling, we learned that they use various practices—stories, songs, rhymes, proximal sensory items—from the storytimes in their daily literacy environments. Songs were the primary elements used, according to the caregivers, followed by rhymes and then stories. These findings were supported by the data from the storytime surveys with 85% of caregivers sharing that they had used content and/or strategies from storytime with their young children in their daily lives (Table 8). This suggests that caregivers are engaging with the storytime content and learning from it. If RBR librarians can be more intentional about sharing information on child development, literacy and learning, and parenting, it is likely they would have a much greater impact on the caregivers’ learning experience and the child’s home learning environment in general.

TABLE 8: CAREGIVERS' USE OF STORYTIME ELEMENTS IN HOME ENVIRONMENTS

Have you ever used anything from the storytimes with your baby/toddler at home?	
Yes	85.09%
No	11.01%
No response	3.67%

The storytime surveys also revealed that the songs were by far the most popular with 75% of respondents indicating that they sing storytime songs at home with their child. Many caregivers expressed enthusiasm for the storytime songs and their child's reception of them such as one caregiver who shared that, through their use of the storytime cleanup song, their child learned how to clean up after herself. Books (30%); manipulatives (21%), particularly shakers; and movement activities (18%) were also popular activities/resources that caregivers learned in RBR storytimes and used at home with their children. Finally, a smaller percentage of caregivers also mentioned being more interactive when reading with their child (3%) and using specific toys (4%) or bubbles (2%) at home because of storytime.

Given the significant transfer of storytime songs into the home environment, RBR librarians should be intentional about using a wide range of songs that incorporate a variety of early learning skills. The FLP Youth Services administrative team can support this by providing song ideas, facilitating sharing of song (and other resource) recommendations, and providing professional development focused on the use of music and songs in programs. In addition, RBR librarians should verbally encourage and model participation in the song's lyrics and movements, to promote the use of storytime songs outside of storytime. Furthermore, the use of library/storytime books outside of the storytime environment could be increased by encouraging families to check out books after storytime and providing a curated selection of books for them to choose from.

While the families who completed the storytime surveys were more focused on using storytimes resources (i.e. songs, books, rhymes, etc), the families who participated in the experience sampling also mentioned using different strategies they learned at storytimes to support language and literacy, child development, and interactions with their child throughout the day. Many of these strategies were modeled and/or encouraged either overtly or subtly by the RBR librarian during the program. Some of these strategies relate to reading and literacy, such as:

- Pointing to and/or underlining words while reading
- Repeating words to call the child's attention to them
- Using enthusiasm while reading
- Incorporating movement and interaction while reading
- Pointing out illustrations
- Letting the child turn the pages
- Checking out diverse books from the library

Other strategies that caregivers mentioned picked up from RBR storytimes and were using at home related to broader learning skills, such as:

- Practicing repetition with books, songs, etc.
- Learning how to interact with an infant
- Animating songs and rhymes
- Using storytelling to narrate events during a child's day
- Using egg shakers, scarves, bubbles, and other manipulatives during the day
- Incorporating dancing into the daily routine

Caregivers also shared that they were using strategies that were related to helping them develop and enhance their interactions with their children, such as:

- Including storytime elements in their daily life
- Building patience with their child
- Being engaging and being themselves with their child
- Learning how to bond with their child by doing activities together
- Remembering that young children may pay attention in different ways
- Learning from how other caregivers' interact with their own children during storytime

One caregiver in particular shared two strategies they use with their children: 1. how they try and make their interactions with their child fun and engaging; and 2. that they are learning to be okay with a certain amount of chaos. They attribute both of these strategies to the overall atmosphere and spirit of the RBR storytime they attend and the expectations set by the librarian for a welcoming, understanding environment.

The use of content from RBR storytimes was not only motivated by the caregivers. Some of the caregivers who participated in the experience sampling shared about instances where the children were recognizing the library from the car as the family drove by, and which ended up prompting a song or activity that the child and caregiver could do together. Or the child might repeat a rhyme or song at home following storytime. These examples show that children are indeed paying attention to and absorbing the storytime elements that the RBR librarian is including in storytimes and building them into their play and everyday experiences.

However, we also learned from the experience sampling that not all families attribute the strategies they are using, such as reading and singing, to the RBR storytime programs. This may be due to not seeing these strategies in the storytimes they attend. RBR storytime programs can vary from branch to branch, and that lack of consistency may mean that some families are not experiencing the same kinds of strategies with regularity. Some caregivers also indicated they were already using the strategies outside of storytime, and/or knew about them before attending storytime. Additionally, families may not remember that they learned these strategies from storytime or they picked the strategies up from somewhere else now that their child is older. Finally, due to shifting RBR program times as well as shifting naptimes for children, some caregivers do not attend RBR programs regularly or sufficiently to feel equipped to implement any strategies or elements from the programs in their daily lives. To encourage more regular attendance, the RBR branches could consider offering multiple RBR programs at different times to meet varying naptimes and work schedules. Or FLP could consider offering centralized guidance with scheduling storytimes at the RBR branches to ensure they cover a variety of days/times so families could attend storytime at a nearby branch if their local branch's schedule does not work for them.

photo by Jacqueline Kociubuk





photo by Ryan Brandenburg

Recommendations

From the data and findings presented above, some recommendations have emerged for enhancing the RBR initiative and helping it be more effective. These recommendations are detailed below.

Recommendations for FLP's Youth Services administrative team and library branch administrators:

- Consider expanding services and programs for young children and their families, e.g. during more accessible times for working caregivers
- Consider surveying RBR families on a semi-regular basis, to inform and develop RBR services that are relevant and meaningful for them
- Provide early literacy training, storytime resources, and planning tools for the RBR librarians, especially for those skills less commonly observed in the evaluation: grammar and syntax, phonological awareness, comprehension and awareness of print material, among others
- Provide training, storytime resources, and planning tools for the RBR librarians that encourage incorporating a variety of storytime elements (i.e. songs, stories, games) and supporting other important aspects of early childhood development and learning
- Provide dedicated time for RBR librarians to engage in intentional storytime planning around these literacy and learning skills
- Provide RBR librarians with opportunities to gather and build a robust community of practice where they can learn strategies and approaches from each other

Recommendations for RBR librarians:

- Take time to build relationships with the families at your RBR programs, learn about the families' daily literacy environments, and connect storytime elements to families' cultures, backgrounds, experiences, and daily literacy environments for added relevance.
- Continue using a variety of songs, fingerplays/rhymes, and bounces in your programs to encourage fine and gross motor movements and caregiver-child interactions.
- Continue intentionally interacting with and incorporating caregivers into the storytime program to support caregiver learning.
- Include explanations on how storytime activities can contribute to children's development and learning to empower caregivers to expand these learning opportunities beyond the library into all aspects of their children's daily lives.
- Cultivate a sense of community between caregivers and families through the following methods so that they can learn from and share information with each other:
 - Encourage families to interact with each other during the storytime
 - Provide space and toys to encourage families to play and interact with each other, prior to and following storytime.
- Take time to engage in intentional planning of RBR storytimes around both early literacy and learning skills and encouraging interactive interactions with children and their caregivers.

photo by Chris Baker Evens





Conclusion

The data presented in this report demonstrate that the RBR storytimes are having a positive impact for the children and families who attend, including with the children's early literacy skills, caregiver knowledge, family literacy environments, and caregiver-and-child interactions. More specifically, the evaluation has revealed several important findings. First, with the RBR storytimes, a large majority incorporate many of the foundational practices that should be present in a baby/toddler storytime. In addition, the storytime providers are including a wide variety of early literacy content in these elements and the children are exhibiting diverse early literacy behaviors while participating in them. Furthermore, the correlation between the early literacy storytime content and the children's early literacy behaviors suggests that children are responding to what the librarian is doing in storytime.

The children's caregivers also have a positive perception of the RBR Initiative and view the storytimes as valuable experiences for their young child. Caregivers are also using things they learn in storytime at home with their young children, potentially leading to long-term impacts for the children's literacy and learning skills. And while the impact of and reception to the Initiative has been positive, there are areas for growth with the RBR storytimes and the broader RBR Initiative, including some specific early literacy skills and engaging and empowering caregivers to support their own child's learning. In addition, caregivers noted the Initiative could benefit from expanded programs, held at more accessible times, and extended library hours. By continuing their current efforts and focusing on the recommendations detailed above, the FLP's Youth Services administrative staff and librarians can deepen and expand the impact they are having for the children and families who participate.

Endnotes

- ¹ It is important to note that the expansion of this initiative began just prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, which resulted in an extended initiative implementation, building closures, social distancing measures, and masking of staff as well as family members.
- ² Feldman, Erika N. 2010. Benchmarks Curricular Planning and Assessment Framework: Utilizing Standards without Introducing Standardization. *Early Childhood Education Journal* 38 (3): 233-42.; Campana, K., Mills, J. E., Capps, J. L., Dresang, E. T., Carlyle, A., Metoyer, C. A., ... & Kotrla, B. (2016). Early literacy in library storytimes: A study of measures of effectiveness. *The Library Quarterly*, 86(4), 369-388.
- ³ The 36 to 60 month sections of BCPAF and PET were not used in the evaluation since they fell outside of the initiative's target age group.
- ⁴ McHugh, M. L. (2012). Interrater Reliability: the Kappa Statistic. *Biochemia Medica*, 22(3), 276-282.
- ⁵ Sensory-related items are things that can be held close to a baby/toddler. These can include shakers, scarves, bubbles, book sets, anything the baby and toddler can directly interact with.

Appendix

Appendix 1: Birth to 18 month tables

TABLE 1: EARLY LITERACY STORYTIME CONTENT FOR CHILDREN, BIRTH TO 18 MONTHS

Birth to 18 Months			
Early literacy storytime content	% of indicators observed across all storytimes		
	Visit 1	Visit 2	Visit 3
Vocabulary & Comprehension Goal: Children use receptive vocabulary and demonstrate comprehension and meaning in language	85.71%	88.10%	77.38%
Vocabulary Goal: Children use expressive vocabulary	72.92%	87.50%	81.25%
Grammar and Syntax Goal: Children demonstrate progression in grammar and syntax	52.78%	50.00%	44.44%
Oral Language Goal: Children use language for a variety of purposes	83.33%	91.67%	58.33%
Oral and Written Communication Goal: Children communicate effectively	50.00%	79.17%	68.75%
Conventions of Social Communication Goal: Children understand and use the conventions of social communication	47.92%	66.67%	58.33%
Reading Goal: Children demonstrate phonological awareness	72.92%	72.92%	58.33%
Reading Goal: Children demonstrate awareness of the alphabetic principle	44.44%	55.56%	44.44%
Reading Goal: Children demonstrate awareness of the print concepts	51.67%	58.33%	35.00%

TABLE 1: (CONT.)

Birth to 18 Months			
Early literacy storytime content	% of indicators observed across all storytimes		
	Visit 1	Visit 2	Visit 3
Reading Goal: Children demonstrate comprehension of printed material	60.42%	79.17%	68.75%
Reading Goal: Children demonstrate awareness of written materials for a variety of purposes	41.67%	50.00%	33.33%
Reading Goal: Children demonstrate appreciation and enjoyment of reading	50.00%	54.17%	45.83%
Writing Indicators	5.00%	5.00%	1.67%

TABLE 2: EARLY LITERACY BEHAVIORS OF CHILDREN, BIRTH TO 18 MONTHS

Birth to 18 Months			
Children's early literacy behaviors	% of indicators observed across all storytimes		
	Visit 1	Visit 2	Visit 3
Vocabulary Goal: Children use receptive vocabulary	45.83%	50.00%	58.33%
Vocabulary Goal: Children use expressive vocabulary	36.67%	33.33%	43.33%
Grammar and Syntax Goal: Children demonstrate progression in grammar and syntax	11.11%	11.11%	16.67%
Comprehension Goal: Children demonstrate comprehension and meaning in language	44.44%	52.78%	55.56%

TABLE 2: (CONT.)

Birth to 18 Months			
Children's early literacy behaviors	% of indicators observed across all storytimes		
	Visit 1	Visit 2	Visit 3
Oral Language Goal: Children use language for a variety of purposes	58.33%	75.00%	64.58%
Listening Goal: Children demonstrate an understanding of language by listening	70.00%	90.00%	85.00%
Oral and Written Communication Goal: Children communicate effectively	58.33%	70.83%	75.00%
Conventions of Social Communication Goal: Children understand and use the conventions of social communication	30.56%	25.00%	36.11%
Reading Goal: Children demonstrate phonological awareness	12.50%	25.00%	22.92%
Reading Goal: Children demonstrate awareness of the alphabetic principle	25.00%	38.89%	36.11%
Reading Goal: Children demonstrate awareness of the print concepts	34.72%	36.11%	29.17%
Reading Goal: Children demonstrate comprehension of printed material	41.67%	39.58%	43.75%
Reading Goal: Children demonstrate awareness of written materials for a variety of purposes	16.67%	37.50%	20.83%
Reading Goal: Children demonstrate appreciations and enjoyment of reading	50.00%	50.00%	45.83%
Writing Goal: Children demonstrates alphabet knowledge	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Writing Goal: Children use writing skills and demonstrates knowledge of writing conventions	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%

Birth to 18 Months			
Children's early literacy behaviors	% of indicators observed across all storytimes		
	Visit 1	Visit 2	Visit 3
Writing Goal: Children use writing for a variety of purposes	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%

Appendix 2: 18 to 36 month tables

TABLE 3: EARLY LITERACY STORYTIME CONTENT FOR CHILDREN, 18 TO 36 MONTHS

18-36 months			
Early literacy storytime content	% of indicators observed across all storytimes		
	Visit 1	Visit 2	Visit 3
Vocabulary & Comprehension Goal: Children use receptive vocabulary and demonstrate comprehension and meaning in language	65.48%	66.67%	70.24%
Vocabulary Goal: Children use expressive vocabulary	10.71%	35.71%	22.62%
Grammar and Syntax Goal: Children demonstrate progression in grammar and syntax	33.33%	33.33%	39.58%
Oral Language Goal: Children use language for a variety of purposes	8.33%	13.89%	11.11%
Listening Goals: Children Demonstrate an understanding of language by listening	70.83%	75.00%	64.58%
Oral and Written Communication Goal: Children communicate effectively	50.00%	61.11%	45.83%
Conventions of Social Communication Goal: Children understand social communication	41.67%	61.67%	76.67%

TABLE 3 (CONT.):

18-36 months			
Early literacy storytime content	% of indicators observed across all storytimes		
	Visit 1	Visit 2	Visit 3
Reading Goal: Children demonstrate phonological awareness	78.33%	76.67%	78.33%
Reading Goal: Children demonstrate awareness of the alphabetic principle	27.08%	27.08%	22.92%
Reading Goal: Children demonstrate awareness of print concepts	20.83%	25.00%	8.33%
Reading Goal: Children demonstrate comprehension of printed material	22.22%	29.17%	30.56%
Reading Goal: Children demonstrate awareness of written materials for a variety of purposes	27.78%	36.11%	36.11%
Reading Goal: Children demonstrate appreciation and enjoyment of reading	18.06%	26.39%	19.44%
Writing Goal: Children demonstrate alphabet knowledge	36.11%	22.22%	22.22%
Writing Goal: Children use writing for a variety of purposes	33.33%	75.00%	75.00%
Indicators related to Oral & Written Communication & Writing	4.17%	0.00%	1.39%

TABLE 4: EARLY LITERACY BEHAVIORS OF CHILDREN, 18 TO 36 MONTHS

18-36 months			
Children's early literacy behaviors	% of indicators observed across all storytimes		
	Visit 1	Visit 2	Visit 3
Vocabulary Goal: Children use receptive vocabulary	70.45%	52.50%	54.55%
Vocabulary Goal: Children use expressive vocabulary	7.58%	10.00%	10.61%
Grammar and Syntax Goal: Children demonstrate progression in grammar and syntax	4.55%	11.67%	6.06%
Comprehension Goal: Children demonstrate comprehension and meaning in language	39.39%	36.67%	45.45%
Oral Language Goal: Children use language for a variety of purposes	3.64%	4.00%	3.64%
Listening Goal: Children demonstrate an understanding of language by listening	78.18%	84.00%	69.09%
Oral and Written Communication Goal: Children communicate effectively	29.55%	23.75%	18.18%
Conventions of Social Communication Goal: Children understand social comm.	41.82%	50.00%	29.09
Reading Goal: Children demonstrate phonological awareness	34.09%	40.00%	36.36%
Reading Goal: Children demonstrate awareness of the alphabetic principle	18.18%	16.67%	12.12%
Reading Goal: Children demonstrate awareness of print concepts	31.82%	35.00%	27.27%

TABLE 4 (CONT.):

18-36 months			
Children's early literacy behaviors	% of indicators observed across all storytimes		
	Visit 1	Visit 2	Visit 3
Reading Goal: Children demonstrate comprehension of printed material	3.03%	16.67%	6.06%
Reading Goal: Children demonstrate awareness that written materials can be used for a variety of purposes	30.30%	33.33%	24.24%
Reading Goal: Children demonstrate appreciation and enjoyment of reading	12.50%	17.50%	11.36%
Writing Goal: Children demonstrate alphabet knowledge	11.36%	10.00%	4.55%
Writing Goal: Children use writing skills and demonstrate knowledge of writing conventions	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Writing Goal: Children use writing for a variety of purposes	2.27%	0.00%	0.00%

